

THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

Phase II of water project complete

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By: The Porterville Recorder

755 homes connected to city system

A partnership of state and local agencies working to help homeowners affected by California's multi-year drought finished connecting 755 homes to a safe, reliable, permanent water supply.

All households participating in the East Porterville Water Supply Project have now been connected to the City of Porterville's municipal water system.

"The project is now complete, at least from the connection side," said City Manager John Lollis, adding that there are other infrastructure improvements that need to be made.

City Public Works Director Mike Reed added, "Everything is virtually done, just touch-up work at this point."

East Porterville resident Amelia Arroyo, who received a water connection in January of 2017, said it is such a relief to have water flowing from the faucet and the shower again.

"It's so easy to take it for granted until it's gone," Arroyo said.

Hundreds of residential wells in the small, unincorporated community of East Porterville in Tulare County became dry or contaminated during California's recent five-year drought. Homes without access to safe potable water received deliveries of tanked water and bottled water. At a monthly price tag of \$650,000, this temporary solution was unsustainable for both the state and community members.

"The residents of East Porterville were especially hard hit by the effects of this recent drought," said Mark Ghilarducci, director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. "Hundreds of homes were at the mercy of Mother Nature as their wells ran dry. Urgent action was needed on the part of many agencies to find short and long-term solutions. It's satisfying to see a long-term solution now in place for many homes, helping to mitigate the impacts of future droughts."

Three state agencies — the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the State Water Resources Control Board, and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services — partnered with Tulare County agencies and community organizations such as Self-Help Enterprises and Community Water Center to deliver a permanent solution to East Porterville's water crisis. Construction on the \$48 million East Porterville Water Supply Project kicked off in early 2016 with the installation of new water distribution lines to connect homes in East Porterville to the neighboring City of Porterville's municipal system.

"The goal was to get a permanent supply of safe water to the residents who were without water, or without safe water, as soon as possible," said Eileen Sobeck, executive director of the State Water Resources Control Board. "The significant impact of the drought on access to safe drinking water for hundreds of local families could not have been addressed without the extraordinary collaboration between state and local governments and the local community groups. We hope the success of the partnerships here will assist in developing new ways of working together and avoid future drought impacts to communities like East Porterville."

The project was conducted in two phases. The first phase connected about 300 homes that were receiving emergency water deliveries. Those connections were completed in March 2017. The second phase connected about 450 additional households that still had access to water in their wells, but who wished to avoid the possibility of future water insecurity. Of the 1,100 homes eligible for the project in both phases, a total of 755 took advantage of the offer.

"I'm glad to know that my family will always have access to clean water now, drought or no drought," said Darcy Stroud, who signed up during Phase 2 of the project. "We didn't sign up right away, but we realized we really wanted the water connection. Better to be safe than sorry."

"While this project has brought relief to many," said Arthur Hinojosa, chief of DWR's Division of Integrated Regional Water Management, "more work is needed to ensure that all California residents have access to clean, safe drinking water. We're supporting regional work to sustainably manage groundwater basins and promoting water use efficiency and conservation to make sure California's local and regional water supplies are resilient for all needs."

Construction will continue through 2018 to complete additional infrastructure supporting the project.

Although the statewide drought officially ended last year, the current water year is off to a dry start and many communities continue to suffer localized drought impacts. Californians everywhere are encouraged to make water conservation a way of life, rain or shine.